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Extending extensive reading

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The April 2015 issue of *Reading in a Foreign Language* featured a discussion forum on extensive reading (ER). Most of the authors, recognized authorities on ER, discussed their views of the principles of ER, particularly in establishing and conducting ER programs. The purpose of this discussion is to review developments in the practice of and the research concerning ER since 1998 and to offer possible directions for the practice of ER.

I begin with a discussion of the nature of extensive reading. This is followed by a presentation and discussion of a survey of the practice of ER and the research findings from 1998 to the present. Based on the results of the survey of the practice ER, an extensive reading continuum is proposed. The discussion closes with a look ahead at what the practice of ER might look like.

The Nature of Extensive Reading

Kelly (1969) claimed that Harold Palmer was the first to use the term *extensive reading* in foreign language (FL) teaching. In Palmer's view of ER, students read a great deal and read quickly. He believed that in ER, books were read for both language study and real-world experiences (i.e., pleasure and information). Another ER pioneer was Michael West. Day and Bamford (1998, p. 6) credited West with developing ER methodology. His term for ER was "supplementary" reading (1955, p. 26).

It is important to note the use of the terms *reading a great deal*, *reading quickly*, and *real-world experiences* in these early conceptions of extensive reading. These original aspects of ER continued to be recognized and utilized since the early days of ER.

Day and Bamford (1998) attempted to determine the nature of successful ER programs. After their study of ER programs, they claimed that successful ER programs had 10 characteristics (pp. 7–8). Influenced by Williams's 1986 article about the top 10 principles for teaching intensive reading, Day and Bamford developed their original characteristics as ER principles. They wrote:

These are what we believe are the basic ingredients of extensive reading. We encourage teachers to use them as a way to examine their beliefs about reading in general and extensive reading in particular, and the ways they teach foreign language reading. We posit these ten principles in the hopes that others will consider them and react to them. (2002, pp. 136–137)

Their top 10 principles were:

1. The reading material is easy.
 2. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics is available.
 3. Learners choose what they want to read.
 4. Learners read as much as possible.
 5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding.
 6. Reading is its own reward.
 7. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.
 8. Reading is individual and silent.
 9. Teachers orient and guide their students.
 10. The teacher is a role model of a reader.
- (Day & Bamford, 2002, pp. 137–141)

In the next section, I report the findings of a survey conducted to determine the extent to which these 10 principles have been used in ER programs.

The Practice of ER Since 1998

The purpose of this discussion is to determine how the practice of ER in the FL classroom matched or followed the 10 principles. This will allow an opportunity to re-examine the nature of ER and the 10 principles.

A search of “The Annotated Bibliography of Works on Extensive Reading in a Second Language” (<http://erfoundation.org/bib/biblio2.php>), which lists over 500 articles related to the theory and implementation of extensive reading, resulted in 44 articles (see the appendix for a list of the articles). There were two criteria for selecting an article. The first was that it had to have *extensive reading* in its title or in its keywords. The second was that the article had to involve a description of an ER program. The 44 articles were examined to see which, if any, of the 10 principles were reported to be practiced in their ER programs. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *The practice of the 10 ER principles in 44 ER programs*

Principles	Times Used
1. The reading material is easy.	34
2. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics is available.	35
3. Learners choose what they want to read.	38
4. Learners read as much as possible.	36
5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding.	28
6. Reading is its own reward.	23
7. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.	20
8. Reading is individual and silent.	31
9. Teachers orient and guide their students.	18
10. The teacher is a role model of a reader.	8

As can be seen from Table 1, Principle #3 *Learners choose what they want to read* was the most often used principle (38 programs). Interestingly, several articles discussed #3 but did not use it in their programs.

Three other principles were also widely used: #4 *Learners read as much as possible* (36 programs), #2 *A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics is available* (35 programs), and #1 *The reading material is easy* (34 programs). Another frequently used principle was #8 *Reading is individual and silent* (31 programs). In contrast, Principle #10 *The teacher is a role model of a reader* was reported to be practiced in only eight programs.

While 23 programs reported using Principle #6 *Reading is its own reward*, nine articles discussed it in their reports but did not use it. In these programs, students were required to write book reports or take tests on their books. For example, “Students were required to write a short book report for each book they read” (Yamashita, 2004, p. 6). Lyutaya’s ER program integrated “writing tasks with a reading project by using a reading log (also known as a reading journal, a response journal, or a reading diary) for pre-, during-, and post-reading activities” (2011, p. 27).

One unexpected finding from the survey of reports of ER programs was an ER program that did not practice any of the 10 principles. Kweon and Kim (2008) did not mention the 10 principles. They reported that in their program:

The students... read three chapter books over the course of 5 weeks. *Holes* deals with the interlocking friendships and individual destinies of a group of teenage delinquents. It is 256 pages long. *Hatchet* is a Robinson Crusoe story about a boy, containing 189 pages. *The Giver* is a work of dystopic science fiction, containing 193 pages. In all, these three books contained 134,013 words and 638 pages. (Kweon & Kim, 2008, p. 196)

Students had to read each text carefully to understand the meaning of the story because they were required to take a detailed comprehension quiz at the beginning of the following class. (Kweon & Kim, 2008, p. 197)

These findings on the practice of extensive reading raise the question: What is extensive reading? One obvious answer is that there is no single approach to the practice of extensive reading. The context in which an ER program is located may preclude the use of some of the 10 principles.

Another way of answering the question is by positing an extensive reading continuum. As we can see in Figure 1, this continuum goes from an ER program that uses the 10 principles (Pure ER) to a program that uses none of the principles yet is called ER (Fringe ER).

Pure ER	Modified ER	ER Light	Fringe ER
10 ER Principles	Many ER Principles	Some ER Principles	ER in Name Only

Figure 1. The extensive reading continuum

With this look at the present practices of ER and the 10 principles as reported in the 44 articles, we might wonder what lies ahead. I take this up in the next section.

Looking Ahead at the Practice of ER

Supervised ER

There are several directions that the practice of ER might take. Obviously, the current practices of *supervised* (or instructed) ER will continue. As Figure 1 shows, supervised ER could take several forms, from *pure* ER to *fringe* ER. Supervised ER does not necessarily have to take place in a school or university. In Ro's (2013) study, he described himself as the participant's mentor. In his role as a mentor, Ro "sat close by reading [his] own English books, and responded to her questions about the storyline, word or phrase meanings, and grammatical structures. In addition, [he] helped her choose the reading materials" (p. 218).

Independent ER

Another possibility is *independent* (noninstructed) ER. This would involve an individual or individuals engaging in ER with no supervision. Indeed, there is one report of this direction. Leung (2002) reported that she had engaged in extensive reading by herself to help her learn Japanese as a foreign language. Wendy, as the author referred to herself, first started to read extensively while she was a graduate student. She took a course on foreign language reading and became very interested in ER. Wendy wanted to take a beginning Japanese course that offered extensive reading but could not find one. So she decided to do ER on her own. She borrowed books from her friends and the local library to learn to read and write Japanese hiragana. She read books that contained mostly vocabulary that she already knew from studying Japanese previously. In nine weeks, Wendy had read 32 books, or about 1,260 pages, of which 170 pages came from children's textbooks and 483 pages were from comic books. The remainder came from children storybooks.

Blended Extensive and Intensive Reading

A third direction that the practice of ER may take is *blended extensive and intensive reading*. Again, this direction is beginning to take place. For example, *Cover to Cover* (Day & Harsch, 2008), focuses on teaching reading strategies and extensive reading. The ER units have excerpts from graded readers that encourage students to engage in extensive reading.

In addition to these directions, I believe that the internet will become very prominent in the practice of ER. It could become a major source of reading material. The internet will most likely be used more often as a way to ensure that students are reading outside of class (e.g., Robb, 2010). Another internet ER tool is the Moodle Reader Module (<http://moodlereader.org/>). It has quizzes on over 4,500 graded readers and books for young readers. This gives teachers an easy way to assess their students' work. The quizzes are randomized with a time limit for their completion. This gives students the opportunity to take the quizzes open-book while minimizing the possibility of cheating.

Ranked Principles

Given the various possibilities for the practice of ER, we turn next to consider the 10 principles and what might be used in ER programs. Based on the results of the survey of the 44 programs presented in Table 1, it is possible to rank the 10 principles in terms of frequency of use. This is done in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. The top three core principles in supervised and independent ER

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1. Learners read as much as possible.
 2. Learners choose what they want to read.
 3. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics is available.
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Table 3. The next three core principles in supervised and independent ER

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4. The reading material is easy.
 5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding.
 6. Reading is individual and silent.
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The remaining four principles would not be used as frequently as these six. The ninth and tenth principles would not be followed in independent ER.

Conclusion

From the study of the 44 reports of ER programs, it is possible to learn the extent to which Day and Bamford's (1998, 2002) top 10 principles were used. This allows insights into the nature of extensive reading. While there is no widespread agreement on exactly what an ER program is, based on the results of the survey, it can be claimed that an ER program uses some of the 10 principles. If none are used, then a so-called ER program is most likely a fringe ER program.

Note

1. This discussion is a major revision of a presentation at the Second World Congress on Extensive Reading, Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea, September 2013.

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